



Avian Influenza – Grimsargh Wetlands Risk Assessment

11 October 2022

Introduction

The following links have helped inform the content of this situation summary and the risk assessment contained within this document, following the confirmation of Avian Influenza in wild birds found deceased onsite at the end of September 2022 – confirmed by Defra on 10th October 2022.

DEFRA has produced extensive guidance on the current avian influenza situation in wild birds, available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mitigation-strategy-for-avian-influenza-in-wild-birds-in-england-and-wales/mitigation-strategy-for-avian-influenza-in-wild-birds-in-england-and-wales>

In addition to this Public Health England’s guidance “Managing the human health risk of avian influenza in poultry and wild birds”:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1045368/Avian_influenza_guidance_and_algorithms_for_managing_incidents_in_birds.pdf

And NatureScot “Highly pathogenic avian influenza (bird flu) - Guidance for site managers”

<https://www.nature.scot/doc/highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza-bird-flu-guidance-site-managers>

Background

Avian influenza is an infectious disease of birds caused by the influenza A virus.

Birds are the hosts for most avian influenza viruses and a variety of influenza subtypes can be found in birds, particularly in waterfowl and shore birds. Domestic poultry are especially vulnerable, and the virus can rapidly cause epidemics in flocks.

Human infections with avian influenza are rare.

In September 2022, a number of wild bird carcasses were observed on the wetlands and in line with national guidance DEFRA were notified and collected and tested the carcasses.

Avian influenza H5 N1 was confirmed in a number of the dead birds in October 2022. As outlined in the wild bird strategy section 12.5, collection of carcasses from the site for testing may now cease as AI has been confirmed.

Risk To Public Health

Within [PHE's document](#) on managing people exposed to avian flu, page 21 outlines a number of possible exposure scenarios. Paragraph 6 clearly states:

“Individuals who have not handled dead or diseased birds or their faeces/litter or eggs are not considered to be at risk and therefore do not require follow-up.”

The primary risk reduction strategy for the wetlands should therefore be aimed at minimising the likelihood of any individuals, whether trustees/contractors or the public, coming into contact with birds.

The wild bird mitigation strategy states outside an AIPZ, “there is no legal requirement for government, local authorities or landowners to limit access to public areas or close rights of way due to avian influenza”.

However, where findings of avian influenza in wild birds have occurred in public areas, local authorities and other land managers may take a precautionary approach to protect **the health and welfare of birds**. They may also consider limiting the risk of infection being transferred on footwear etc. to other areas, by restricting access to areas where wild birds frequently congregate where this does not impact public rights of way.”

This is primarily aimed at preventing spread of AI in bird populations rather than minimising risk to health.

From DEFRA mitigation strategy (17.3):

“Communication is a key measure in mitigating risk of transmission of avian influenza between birds and protecting public health. During periods of increased risk from avian influenza signage should be displayed at key access and other points on sites warning the general public of the risk of avian influenza and the measures they can take to protect themselves and both kept and wild birds from avian influenza.”

Therefore, communication with people using the site in addition to mitigation to prevent access form the basis of our risk mitigation

Section 19 of the wild bird strategy does outline possible scenarios/AI strains that may lead to more stringent measures being implemented.

No such strain/measures have been identified or declared as part of this situation.

Risk Assessment/Risk Register (overleaf)



Activity	Risk	Controls/mitigation	Likelihood	Acceptable	Further action required to minimise risk
Public accessing the site “as normal” – walking/bird watching/photography	Exposure to dead/dying bird or faecal matter	<p>All areas where birds nest/congregate/puddle/ feed are behind fences, no public access to site.</p> <p>Regular checks on site/feedback from users and trustees on any areas where dead birds/faecal matter accumulated</p> <p>Signage warning people of risks</p> <p>Trustees to remove any carcass on the public areas to a non-public area and await retrieval by the Council.</p>	Low	yes	No – birds/faecal matter very rarely in public areas. Even larger spaces such as compound/viewing areas see little bird activity in public areas
Member of public acting as “good Samaritan”	Risk of actively seeking out sick bird within the fenced area	Fencing well maintained/no areas of easy access. Signage warning not to touch birds visible	Low	Yes	Yes – regular review of signage
Collection/disposal of dead carcasses	Exposure to dead/dying birds and contamination	<p>Assessment of need to collect carcass (section 21.4 mitigation) – ask DEFRA advice</p> <p>Use of PPE for collecting carcasses if need to remove from areas not accessible by contractors, in line with guidance. Disposal workers will be briefed about the “slip and</p>	Medium	Low	<p>Yes - Clear plan for carcass collection/leaving in place.</p> <p>We have a collection of full PPE for use by trustees. Anyone involved in collection will be made aware of signs and symptoms of possible AI in humans. Consider notifying</p>



		<p>trip” hazards working on the steep embankments, particularly if dressed in full PPE.</p> <p>Commissioning of approved collectors/pest control to ensure appropriate handling and disposal of carcasses</p>			PHE as and when collection/exposure has occurred in case health advice/monitoring is needed
Volunteer days	Exposure to dead/dying birds and contamination	<p>Volunteers would not be involved with the removal of carcasses. A reasonable time for work to resume on the Wetlands is 14 days after the “last carcass observed”.</p> <p>There is a work plan for each work session. However, no volunteer will be asked to work in areas where there is likely to be carcasses or faecal matter. The embankments around the Island Lake are the high- risk areas – that is where the geese congregate and there is a large amount of faecal matter on those embankments. The embankments around the Mere are lower risk and those around the Fen are the lowest, based on goose/bird numbers seen there. Even lower risk are public access areas – pathways/compound etc</p>	low	<p>People should be observant. However, it would be hoped that volunteer days will not resume until this latest outbreak has subsided or 14 days after the last carcass is observed.</p>	



		<p>Volunteers will not be asked to work on the Wetlands if there is a risk of avian flu.</p> <p>When volunteer days resume, volunteers will be advised to wear work gloves at all times.</p> <p>We will review our drinks breaks policy.</p> <p>As a precaution, disinfectant boot /tool baths will be in place, when volunteer days resume.</p> <p>Volunteers will be briefed regarding avian flu risks and what to do should they come across a carcass.</p>			
	Exposure to nests?	As above	low		
Use of contractors to deliver work on behalf of trust		Ensure aware of situation, advice to minimise contact with birds and ask that they have undertaken own risk assessment. We would issue the same advice as above for volunteers.	low		

Wider risk assessment

The Wetlands may consider an additional mitigation strategy¹ that could be proportionately implemented to address the potential risk to the wider bird population, if the number of cases continues to rise.

This might include:

Biosecurity measures

Biosecurity

There are some simple ways that everyone can help to prevent the spread of HPAI. These steps will help to minimise the risk of spreading animal and plant diseases, as well as non-native species onto wildlife sites.

Follow these simple steps before you enter or leave the wetlands site:

Check

Check your footwear, outerwear and equipment for mud, plant material or bird droppings. Remove anything you find and leave it where you are.

Clean

Make sure everything is clean and visually free of mud, soil, faeces, etc. If necessary, use a brush or wash in soapy water.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1100129/APHA_Avian_Influenza_Poster_Wild_birds_2.pdf